

My name is Nicole R Murphy, and I am an aspiring writer. My focus is particularly in the genres of science fiction, fantasy and romance. I have had quite a lot of participation in the science fiction/fantasy field, as I have been part of organising the Conflux science fiction conventions in Canberra for five years, and have edited The Outcast, a small press anthology published by The Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild, and also edited Issue 25 of Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, published by the Andromeda Spaceways Co-operative.

I believe that making changes to the copyright act right now would be a pointless exercise, because we are on the verge of major changes in how literature is delivered to people. As people become more confident with the internet and using their credit cards for purchases, and as electronic readers become better and better, the number of books that are sold is going to decrease. There are going to be a whole lot of copyright issues that will arise that will negate some of the proposed changes to the act.

It seems to me that the main people agitating for change are booksellers, in order to a) increase consumer numbers by decreasing prices and b) overcome the usual practice of basically renting a book from a publisher rather than buying to sell outright, which is a better business practice. While I don't see books ever completely dying, or booksellers no longer existing, it is an industry that technology is going to plunder and downsize. So making changes to assuage an industry that is starting to decline seems to me a strange thing to do.

More and more people will be accessing their literature either via online bookstores or electronically. As online purchases grow, there will be less need for publishers to deal with booksellers – they can start to develop

their own shop fronts, and cut out the middleman. I think that's one of the reasons that Amazon, for example, is expanding beyond simply bookselling, so they have diversity to succeed.

Electronic publishing, however, is where the interesting affect on copyright lies. Already, authors are having to deal with the idea of individual countries wanting to publish electronically. How, for example, can you allow your American publisher to put your work up on their website to draw in book sales (something American publishers are getting more and more interested in doing) when it can impact on the sales of your Australian copyrighted or Commonwealth copyrighted or European copyrighted books? It's very hard to block non-Americans from accessing the work. And if you do just publish electronically (as some authors do), then how do you protect that copyrighted work? And what of authors bypassing publishing companies and publishing and selling their own work electronically?

I believe, from my own experience and the anecdotes of speaking to friends who are highly successful published authors, that now is not the time to be changing the copyright act. The changes made in the 1990s, to my mind, have already opened Australia up to overseas books and ensuring good international literature arrives here at a reasonable price. And now, with the internet, people have the opportunity to become their own importer. But we can't foresee the exact changes that will happen to publishing over the next decade or so, and we shouldn't be making wholesale changes to laws that protect the cultural integrity of Australian artists until we do know what the impacts will be.